

Back Cast

By Ron Wilson



Plans, being what they are, sometimes fall through. So was the case with a pheasant hunt sometime back that got bumped for whatever reason – work, chores around the house, something I can't begin to remember, so it couldn't have been that darn important.

Bottom line, the trip would go on as advertised, just without me. Then the oddest thing happened. The guy I bailed on asked without hesitation if my bird dog could still tag along.

Maybe it's just me, but in my world you borrow lawnmowers, wheelbarrows and occasional cups of sugar from neighbors and friends – not bird dogs, family members or toothbrushes.

I was questioning recently what I'd add to the list of things I wouldn't lend as I sifted through an assortment of fly rods in the basement. I was trying to find just the right rod for my oldest son to practice casting in the back yard in preparation for a week-long fly-fishing trip later this month.

Some serious thought goes into something like this. First, I wanted to find the right fit, a rod that would feel good in his hands – something with a sweet touch, but enough backbone to pitch a fly into the wind. Second, I wanted to pick the one rod I'd be the least bummed out about if he snapped the tip off against the swing set, or left it unattended in the back yard for the dog to gnaw on the cork handle.

I was 12 once, so I understand the odds of something like this happening. I broke the tip twice on a sweet, little 7 1/2-foot fly rod a local rod builder made for me when I was a kid. The rod was the color of a newly-minted

penny, with my name and the trout stream I haunted, painted carefully in cursive just above the cork handle. Aside from a pretty impressive baseball card collection, it was my most prized possession. After a day on the water, I'd polish it with an old tube sock from head to toe.

Two accidents and repairs later, however, the rod had shrunk to under seven feet and cast like a curtain rod.

Three of the rods I recently slipped from hard-sided cases and cloth sheaths were crafted by the same rod maker and passed down over time. None have seen the water in years because the sentimental value is high and I'd hate to slam one in a pickup door. Plus, none cast as well as the rods I use on a regular basis made of Space Age materials that are difficult to pronounce.

It's unlikely these homemade rods will ever be used again, which is a shame, really, because that flies in the face of why they were built in the first place. They're not showpiece material either, so displaying them for the sake of showing them off isn't an option. Their fate is storage, which is the way I like it for now because I know they're out of harms way, even though there are several good fish left in them. When I'm gone, my kids are free to do what they wish with the rods, but I'm guessing they would have

preferred that I'd not sold the baseball card collection.

I wrestled with the idea of handing my son one of three newer rods I use most often, but balked because each is worth more than a pickup payment. I don't write this as a way to impress anyone with the worth of the rods because I certainly didn't pay full price for them. They came my way for a fraction of the cost as I was in the right place at the right time and because I'm related in a roundabout way to the fly-fishing guide getting rid of them.

I swapped the fly-fishing guide a varmint rifle for the honey of the bunch – a 7 1/2-foot, 4-weight that's a pleasure to fish on small waters – while waiting out a thunderstorm along a trout river in Wyoming. We sealed the deal with a toast from a couple of warm beverages that had sloshed around in our backpacks for most of the day.

In theory, a backyard mishap or on-stream accident to any of the three newer rods wouldn't be the end of the world as they come with lifetime guarantees. In reality, however, I don't have proof of purchase for any of the rods, unless you count clinking two aluminum cans together along a gorgeous trout stream.

It'll take some time to settle the fly rod selection issue for my son, but in the interim he's welcome to borrow my bird dog.

